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Sacajawea vs. Charbonneau

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Anti-French Sentiment in Lewis & Clark Expedition Fiction

Laura Knowlton-Le Roux

1 The deflation of the Sacajawea myth, a recent trend in scholarship on the Lewis and Clark expedition, has come at a time when its power to inspire American youth has never been greater. But admiration for Sacajawea, while certainly not unmerited, has been based on a portrait distorted by a century of embellishments, exaggerations and endeavors to bestow a nobility of birth and sentiment on her. The Lewis and Clark expedition in its novelistic form amplifies her role, giving her « a prominence that competes even with that of the captains. » (Moulton 380) Starting in the late nineteenth-century, Sacajawea was given the elevated status of an Indian princess who recognized the superiority of the Americans and was totally compliant with their expansionist goals. An example taken from the 1902 expedition novel *The Conquest, The True Story of Lewis and Clark* by Eva Emery Dye illustrates the extent to which the portrait of Sacajawea became an exercise in hyperbole. According to Dye, Sacajawea was « a born linguist »(Dye 250) and a « new sort of mortal. » (Dye 252) Moreover, her physical presence and beauty put her on a different spiritual plane : "Sacajawea's hair was neatly braided, her nose was fine and straight, and her skin pure copper like the statue in some old Florentine gallery. Madonna of her race, she had led the way to a new time. » (Dye 290)

2 In works by historians and commentators such as Stephen Ambrose or Larry McMurtry, readers interested in Sacajawea are encouraged to carry out their own dry-eyed examination of the journals. The facts of Sacajawea's true participation in the expedition have since been established in many publications, and, in fact, only a handful of incidents in the journals forms a basis for a very sketchy portrait of her. The average reader who has been exposed to the legend cultivated in the many novels based on the Lewis & Clark story will certainly be surprised by the lack of a description of Sacajawea or of a more detailed account of her actions. Often, the captains didn't use her name, preferring indirect references such as « the interpreter's wife, » « our squaw, » « the Indian woman, » « the Squar, » « Charbono's Snake Indian wife. » Historians and novelists eager to fill in the gaps have exploited the vagueness of the journals over the last hundred

years, producing accounts they claim are « truthful » of Sacajawea's thoughts and motivations, and of an innately romantic nature which they invented for her. As she was primed to pay a central role in frontier myth, she was simultaneously recast as the martyr of a brutal French husband and a potential love interest for Lewis or Clark.

3 An in-depth examination of various editions of the journals, such as the 1893 edition by Elliot Coues and the 1964 edition by John Bakeless, and of original copies of several expedition novels, including *The Conquest: The True Story of Lewis and Clark* by Eva Emery Dye (1902), *Bird Woman (Sacajawea): The Guide of Lewis and Clark* by James Schultz (1918), *Red Heroines of the Northwest* by Byron Defenbach (1930), *Star of the West: The Romance of the Lewis and Clark Expedition* by Ethel Hueston (1935), *Forward the Nation* by Donald Peattie (1942), *Sacagawea of the Shoshones* by Della Gould Emmons (1943) and *Sacajawea* by Anna Lee Waldo (1978) reveals the strategies used by several of the novelists to reshape the image of contact between the Americans and native peoples. The films *The Far Horizons* (directed by Rudolph Maté, 1955) and *The Big Sky* (directed by Howard Hawks, 1952) brought fictionalized encounters to the silver screen. I will argue that an aspect of the creation of the Sacajawea myth which has been overlooked, the unflattering portrayal of her husband Toussaint Charbonneau, actually played a central role in its construction. Charbonneau the « squaw man » became just as much a myth as Sacajawea in the expedition novels ; he too was endowed with a disproportionate share of importance, but because he was used to represent the French threat to the Americans. The vilification of Charbonneau is common to expedition fiction, with only one exception.[1] I will demonstrate how it enables the authors to create a distinct moral advantage for the Americans and the heroic Sacajawea, to prove the importance of establishing a wholesome, enlightened American presence to supplant the decadent French one, and lastly to illustrate the superiority of romantic love over the native peoples' immoral sexual conduct.

4 Historians continue to decry the « enduring, exasperating romance of Sacajawea » (Fresonke 11) without reflecting on the pitfalls of the enterprise of popularizing the Lewis and Clark story. The problem with the expedition, from a publisher's or a film producer's standpoint, is that it is decidedly lacking in the basic ingredients of compelling fiction, such as romance or rivalry. While there is certainly adventure in the journals, only one member of the Corps of Discovery dies (and worse, only from a natural cause, probably appendicitis), the bears do not tear anyone to shreds, and the Indians are not treacherous enough. Map-drawing, the discovery of new species and the observation of Native peoples' customs simply do not make a bestseller. Fictional accounts of the expedition therefore made great use of its marginal members, such as York, Charbonneau, Sacajawea, and even their son Jean Baptiste, to enliven what many have called our nation's epic. This tendency actually originated in the 1893 edition of the journals in three volumes by Elliott Coues, who, far from being a historian, was an army surgeon and avid traveler to the expedition sites. He liberally redrew Sacajawea's character and increased her participation in the journey considerably. His work strayed widely from what was originally recorded about the expedition, for example describing Sacajawea as « wonderful » and « admirable, » and Charbonneau, as her « craven French apology for a male. » (Coues I, 311)

5 The alterations made by Coues blossomed in expedition fiction. While pro-feminist arguments contributed to the uplifting of Sacajawea's character,[2] anti-French sentiment was used to sharpen the storyline through various incidents involving Charbonneau and

Sacajawea. The primary stereotypes of French behavior that come into play in the novels are an obsession with sex, laziness, a lack of civilized behavior, garrulity and a comical inability to master the English language. As one historian put it, Charbonneau's only qualities were his cooking and his wife (Bakeless xiii). In *Red Heroines of the Northwest* (1930), Defenbach introduces Charbonneau as part of the « noisy » French group in the expedition: « the one-eyed Cruzatte and another Frenchman, Labiche, and still another *parley vous*, Toussaint Charboneau. This last was the most talkative. » (Defenbach 77) Charbonneau's voluble personality is reported by all the novelists, who relate his rowdiness and capacity for riling up the camp.[3] Even the children's history of Sacajawea, *A Picture Book of Sacagawea* has this to say about Charbonneau : « ...the Hidatsa sold Sacagawea to Toussaint Charbonneau, a white trader and trapper. Charbonneau was in his forties. He was a rough, loud man...He bought Sacagawea to be his second wife. » (Adler 6)

6 What we really know about Charbonneau is essentially limited to what the journals say about him. Such fundamentals as his date of birth remain unknown, varying from 1758 to 1767, depending on the source. Additional information cited by certain authors indicates that while on a hunting and trading mission almost ten years before the expedition Charbonneau raped a young girl and suffered a beating at the hands of her mother.[4] His relationship with Sacajawea is also sufficiently unclear to leave a wide margin for speculation in the historical accounts and in the novels. Did he win Sacajawea in a bet or did he buy her ? Did he consider her a slave ? Was he jealous of her « success » with the captains ? The captains refer to Charbonneau beating Sacajawea in a journal entry from August 14th 1805 : « This evening Charbonneau struck his Indian woman, for which Captain Clark gave him a severe reprimand. » (Bakeless 235) This passage, however, is absent from the Moulton and DeVoto editions of the journals.

7 So little is known that every biographical entry on Charbonneau seems to circle back to the same pieces of information and anecdote. Lewis is reported to have said that Charbonneau was « a man of no particular merit, » but aside from certain moments when Lewis shows his impatience over Charbonneau not sharing information with him about the departure of the Shoshones or over his failure to ensure that Sacajawea respected her diet when ill, the opinion of the captains seems to be relatively neutral. Clark's oft-cited letter to Charbonneau in which he reiterates his offer to educate Jean Baptiste and the fact that he later retained Charbonneau's services are generally seen as signs that he did make a positive contribution to the expedition. It is not my intention to « rehabilitate » Charbonneau, but rather to point out the ways in which his characterization has been totally transformed to serve the purpose of expedition romance, exactly as has Sacajawea's.[5]

8 Dye's introduction of Charbonneau uses broken English to convey his roughness. As he introduces Sacajawea to the explorers, Charbonneau alternately fails to use verbs or conjugate them : « 'She my slave,' said Charboneau, a Frenchman in blanket capote and kercheif (sic) around his head. 'I buy her from de Rock Mountain. I make her my wife.' » (Dye 188) Whereas we know from the journals that Charbonneau did not speak English, Dye and Defenbach report his speech in broken English for the sake of comic relief, but also to reinforce our impression of his incompetence. At every turn, Defenbach uses Charbonneau's Frenchness to create an atmosphere of slapstick comedy. Defenbach's version of the pirogue incident, for example, depicts Charbonneau as too preoccupied with telling a tall tale about a « beeg bear » chasing him around in circles to notice that

he was about to capsize : « ‘I begin git *vertige*—you know—w’at you call heem? deezy.’ » Then, as disaster is close, Charbonneau starts to panic, appealing to Cruzatte : « ‘Ah, mon ami, w’at I goin’ do ?’ he yelled. ‘Come queeck, *mon frère* ; come queeck.’ » (Defenbach 82-3) The choice of voicing Charbonneau in heavily-accented English is all the more curious because Charbonneau would naturally have spoken French to Cruzatte. By contrast Sacajawea is often voiced in very eloquent English : « ‘On this very spot my people camped five years ago...and here was I captured !’ » (Dye 224) Language thereby serves as an additional means for Dye and Defenbach to contrast Sacajawea’s composure in the face of danger with Charbonneau’s panicky French dithering.

9 The « craven French » male is belittled throughout expedition fiction while the spotlight is thrown on Sacajawea. Sacajawea’s brave conduct is attested by Lewis, who praises her « fortitude and resolution » in his May 16, 1805 journal entry. The traits of cowardice and laziness are associated with being French in three of the novels. For example, the novelists depict Charbonneau as paralyzed by fear while Sacajawea dives into the dangerous waters to save the captain’s instruments : « One can see the little squaw, figure lithe and agile, her Indian face stolid in expression, oblivious to the confusion around her, the three-months-old baby strapped to her back, swimming in the swift cold current with the instinctive skill of an aquatic animal, seizing and saving valuable items of the cargo as they floated past. » (Defenbach 83) We know from the journals that Sacajawea never ended up in the water, yet the temptation to exaggerate is too great for the novelists and screenwriters. The swimming scene was also filmed for *The Far Horizons*. Sacajawea, after dutifully listening to Clark’s speech about the importance of a compass surpassing that of a man, is willing to sacrifice her life to save it from the rapids after the craft overturns. In *Forward the Nation*, C. Peattie invents a scene in which the captains reward Sacajawea with a string of glass beads for her bravery while Charbonneau has « sunk low in their estimation » (Peattie 123). E. Hueston’s *Star of the West* portrays Clark complimenting Sacajawea in these unlikely terms : « Janey, what an unexpected asset you are turning out to be ! » (Hueston 130) while Charbonneau remains « the least capable member of the party » (Hueston 131). Moreover, Charbonneau is lazy and unreliable. Describing his behavior at Fort Manuel after leaving Jean Baptiste with Clark, Hueston says, « Occasionally he asserted his national prerogative and took French leave for a few weeks, sometimes for months, returning when desire, or necessity, impelled. » (Hueston 360) References to Charbonneau’s refusal to pitch in and work like the others are numerous. Whereas Charbonneau only acts in his own interest, Sacajawea by contrast is always industrious to the point of being desperate to help the captains.

10 Naturally, no opportunity is missed to use Charbonneau’s reported cowardice to highlight the bravery and ingenuity of the American captains. Much is made of the incident of June 29, 1805 during which Clark, Charbonneau, Sacajawea, and Jean Baptiste were nearly swept away when a flash flood caused the waters to rise in the place where they had taken shelter. As Clark himself put it, Charbonneau was « makeing attempts to pull up his wife by the hand much Scared and nearly without motion » (Moulton 142) While it seems that Charbonneau was again paralyzed by fear, Schultz alters the incident considerably by adding Sacajawea’s appraisal of the events : « ‘And who do you think it was that saved me and my little son ? My man ? No. By his hard pulling and pushing, Red Hair saved the three of us from being taken by the awful rise of roaring water...Can you wonder that I loved Red Hair more than ever ?’...‘He was the best man that I ever knew.’ » (Schultz 151) This passage and others like it were also used to show a fundamental difference between

how the Frenchman treats Sacajawea and, by extension, native peoples, and the Americans' more courageous actions and more progressive views. The question of Sacajawea's diet after her illness is another case in point. We know from the journals that Clark did indeed reprimand Charbonneau when he failed to prevent Sacajawea from eating too much. But in the novels, Charbonneau shows yet again how the French lack respect for native women. When the captains criticize him, he responds defensively : « 'These squaws are not like white women...Coddling is bad for them. It makes them lazy and indifferent. They must learn to eat what they can get and be satisfied. They must not be humored in this manner.' » (Hueston 174) The famous vote for the winter campsite so pithily described by Clark (November 23, 1805) is presented as another occasion to illustrate the Frenchman's backward treatment of his wife : « Charbonneau was furious... Asking the opinion of a slave squaw !...Once he got her to Mandan, he would take this nonsense out of her in short order ! He would show who was running his squaws ! » (Hueston 243)

11 Novelists certainly seize on this differing degree of consideration for Sacajawea to drive the romantic storyline. Her love for the captains grows from her admiration for their mission. Emmons describes how Sacajawea's « heart was singing, her face alight with worship for these white men going to her people, going to send traders to them, going to free them from hunger and fear. » (Emmons 106) The seductive effect of Manifest Destiny on Sacajawea is illustrated by another expedition novel commonplace, the naming scene in which the captains insist on giving Sacajawea the honor of having an American name :

> 'Charbonneau,' Clark turned to the Frenchman...'if this woman is going to travel with us, can't we give her a name I can twist my tongue around ? I am too much the soldier to labor with—whatever that long word is that means Bird-Woman. Can't we give her a new name, one more adapted to my rude speech ?'
> 'Call her 'squaw' if you like. It is what she is,' said Charbonneau agreeably.
> 'No, that will not do. She must have a name...'How would you like to be called—say —Janey ?'
> 'Ja-ney,' She repeated. 'What does it mean ?'
> 'It means a very nice lady,' he said, with his most engaging smile.
> 'I will be called Ja-ney,' she said. 'It is often that I have a new name...He,' indicating Charbonneau, 'calls me *Femme* or Squaw, and sometimes,' she admitted, 'Dog. Now I will be called Ja-ney.' (Hueston 111)

12 The American's treatment of Sacajawea is consistently more deferential than Charbonneau's. Clark's refusal of the denigrating word « squaw » is offered as proof of his superiority over Charbonneau. Hueston invents the heavy-handed reference to Charbonneau calling Sacajawea « Dog. » In the film *The Far Horizons*, Clark negotiates this name change directly with Sacajawea : « You mind if I call you Janey ?' 'What does it mean ?''It means beautiful.' »

13 The fact that Charbonneau does not compare to the captains in terms of bravery is well attested in the journals, but nothing provides sound foundation for the scathing judgments found in the novels and in the presentation of the expedition prepared by the historian John Bakeless for his edition of the journals, widely read since the nineteen-sixties. His work legitimizes many of the fictional elements of characterization which arose in the expedition novels by representing them as fact. Chief among them is the claim that Charbonneau was not « civilized, » but was rather a white man who had gone « native. » Defenbach, as well as other novelists, had already made this claim : « ... one of those men...while white, had little to distinguish him from the Indians. His name was Toussaint Charbonneau...A Frenchman he was, of course. He was about forty years

old, skin tanned as dark as any Indian, wore leggings, a jacket made from a blanket, and a red handkerchief tied around his head in lieu of a hat. » (Defenbach 64) In this description, Defenbach clearly intends to suggest that the French have a dishonorable tendency to blend with the Indian population. Even more explicit, Hueston gives a detailed list of the character traits shared by the « savages » and the « French squaw men : » « They have no morals. They steal, and rob, and lie, and kill each other, and have many wives. » (Hueston 335) Bakeless is categorical in his judgment of Charbonneau : « The only dubious individual taken along from the Mandan country was the ne'er-do-well squaw man, Toussaint Charbonneau. » (Bakeless xii)

14 Bakeless gives added geopolitical weight to this characterization by suggesting that supplanting the decadent French presence was one of the goals of the expedition :

> Otherwise, the tribes of the wild interior had gained little respect for the white race in such isolated contacts as had taken place. The squaw men who settled among them for life were misfits of white society—men like René Jussome, whom one acquaintance called an « old sneaking cheat, » or the worthless Toussaint Charbonneau, whose redeeming virtues seem to have been only that he was an excellent cook and had an admirable wife. The white visitors to the Mandan villages, said a Canadian trader, were 'a set of worthless scoundrels who are generally accustomed to visit those parts.'...The two Americans, on the other hand, took a relatively enlightened attitude toward the tribes. (Bakeless xiii)

15 If we follow his reasoning, it would seem that Native Americans are justified in having a bad opinion of whites because they have only encountered French men. This interpretation of Charbonneau's character was intended to give added importance to Lewis and Clark's mission of gaining the confidence of Native Americans and encouraging them to establish trade relations with Americans. As Bakeless presents it, this entails undoing the harm which the French have caused.

16 *The Far Horizons* makes use of a confrontation between French and American influences to give a more ominous shading to the expedition story. Charbonneau is portrayed as an underhanded outcast, unmarried and living amongst the Indians. He haughtily interrupts Lewis and Clark's discussions with the Minnetaree chief Le Borgne, informing them, « Americans cannot trade here, this territory belongs to France. » Lewis's response, « News evidently hasn't reached you about the Louisiana purchase... » leaves Charbonneau belligerent and resolved to plot to halt the expedition. Charbonneau responds to Lewis's request for assistance by refusing to help them « ruin his business. » Le Borgne and Charbonneau then plot for Charbonneau to mislead the expedition so that the Minnetarees may ambush them. Le Borgne's reward for Charbonneau's treachery would be Sacajawea. Of course, Sacajawea saves the Corps of Discovery from being scalped by the Minnetarees. The script, loosely based on the expedition novel *Sacagawea of the Shoshones*, by Della Gould Emmons, carries the tendencies we have seen in the novels to a much greater degree of polarization ; Charbonneau is an actively treacherous Frenchman and Sacajawea is a heroic Shoshone captive slave with no husband or baby to get in the way of her budding love relationship with Clark. This paves the way for stock scenes such as Charbonneau threatening Sacajawea and finally Clark beating Charbonneau in a knife fight at the campfire. Charbonneau's fate is sealed after the knife fight as Lewis instructs Sergeant Gass to give Charbonneau some food and send him back down the river. Clark reassures Sacajawea that America is « a free country » and that she doesn't belong to anyone. « Our customs are different. We don't get our women in a fight or buy them, » he explains to Sacajawea. She is favorably impressed with the superior morals of the

Americans. In less than half an hour, the French threat which served as one of the only plot devices in the film has been defused.

17 The earlier film *The Big Sky*, although far superior to *The Far Horizons*, actually shares several of its plot devices and characterizations. The story of murderous fights for trapping and trading territories along the Upper Missouri River in the 1830s has a cast of characters similar to those in expedition fiction, with Jim and Boone as the Americans, Boone's uncle Zeb as the « half Injun » guide and trader who works with the « crazy Frenchman » Jourdonnais and his rowdy French-speaking crew, and the daughter of a Blackfoot chief given the name « Teal Eye. » The plot revolves around the Americans' rivalry over a woman, with romantic love shown as superior to the practices of the French or the native peoples. When Jim and the Blackfoot guide « Poor Devil » come under fire on the river bank, they are left for dead by the apathetic French crew, who lack in bravery and murmur « C'est dommage. Il n'y a plus rien à faire. » The chief strength of *The Big Sky*, however, is its embrace of precisely those moral, cultural, or linguistic ambiguities which *The Far Horizons* rejects. Rather than ignoring the language difficulties along the trail or using them for caricature only, for example, the film shows how painstaking the process of understanding could be. The « uncivilized » Zeb and the blustery Jourdannais are given a much fuller, balanced treatment than Charbonneau. *The Big Sky* succeeds because it identifies the commercial interests as the enemy ; the real criminals are the fur company and its employees.

18 Fornication and bigamy, which resonate in the term « squaw man, » are the chief accusations against Charbonneau. Bakeless insists on bringing this aspect of Charbonneau's character to the fore ; he even goes so far as to cite one of the derisive nicknames which the Indians had supposedly given him : « Man-Part Never Limp » (as quoted in Waldo 130). As this nickname is absent from all other accounts, historical or fictional, it is probably simply a fabrication. It is quite revelatory, however, of a tendency to identify amoral sexual practices with the French men who settled in Indian villages. Bakeless is certainly not the first author to identify loose sexual conduct as French, as attested by the journal entry on the subject of sexual contact with Mandan women authored by Gass on April 5, 1805 : « It may be observed generally that chastity is not very highly esteemed by these people, and that the severe and loathsome effects *of certain French principles* are not uncommon among them. » (Moulton 90, author's emphasis) The French principles in question are obviously those of prostitution, as Gass goes on further to cite the « price » of sleeping with the daughter of the headchief of the Mandan nation : an old tobacco box. The descriptions Lewis gives of sexual practices amongst the Shoshone (August 19, 1805) and the Clatsops, Chinnooks and Killamucks (January 6, 1806) are practically identical, evoking the prostitution of wives and daughters for a fishing hook or a strand of beads (Lewis does not describe these practices as French). The tone of the captains' observations about sexual relations with Native women is generally quite neutral. The only recommendations of restraint were issued by Lewis because of the risk of souring new friendships with Indians or because of the medical consequences for the men.

19 Whereas the journals indicate that a high number of the men took advantage of the sexual favors which were available (some have argued that the captains should be counted in their numbers), the novels simply do not relate this story. While historians have traced this silence to the fear of miscegenation, it is also obvious that the stories of sexual contact were simply incompatible with the enlightenment story that the authors

preferred to project. In fact, the novelists, through their depiction of Charbonneau's treatment of Sacajawea, displace the embarrassing issue of sexual contact with Native Americans onto the French character. Peattie even goes so far as to have Charbonneau threaten to prostitute Sacajawea because of his jealousy of her : « You are getting too proud and too bold. You think the white captains have some regard for you...You are so fond of Redhead and Monsieur Louis. Very well, then, I will take you to them, and you can sleep on their blankets ! » (Peattie 125) In Peattie's novel, Charbonneau reaches the bottom of his depraved French nature ; the scene seems to suggest that the French, like the Indians, prostitute their women. Hueston infers that the Frenchman hated the laws and the morals of the Americans and desired « taking a new young squaw » because after the expedition « Sacajawea was no pleasure to him. She was an old woman—nearly twenty-five years old. » (Hueston 356)

20 Certain novelists portray Charbonneau as a rapist, making him seem even more monstrous. In *Sacajawea of the Shoshones*, Emmons states that at the age of forty-three, he raped Sacajawea when she was only fifteen. In Anna Lee Waldo's *Sacajawea*, an expedition novel which reached bestseller status on the *New York Times* list, Charbonneau is thoroughly demonized ; he becomes a crazed, hairy animal who stalks the adolescent Sacajawea in the forest : « Each time he had shadowed this child, who was clear-featured and slim, exquisitely made, beautiful by the standards of whites and Indians alike, the one part of frenzied daring had come a bit closer to prevailing over the nine parts of sheer cowardice that composed his French nature. » (Waldo 146) Yet again, lust and cowardice are the Frenchman's chief characteristics, whereas the novelists simply choose to ignore the problem of the American men's sexual desire for Indian women ; the frequent episodes of sexual contact we know of through the journals are not represented. Romantic love is projected as the Americans' high standard which the Frenchman or the Natives ignore or cannot meet. Although what we know of romantic love through the journals themselves is essentially limited to Lewis' brief observation on May 29, 1805 that a « handsome river » would be named for Judith, « Cap. C who assended this R much higher than I did has <thought proper to> call it Judieths River » (Moulton 116), each of the many little incidents related in the journals to which a romantic interpretation may be given—the naming of Sacajawea River, Sacajawea's gift of two dozen white weasel tails to Clark, etc.—is fully exploited in the novels. The film *The Far Horizons* represents the epitome of the romanticizing of the expedition ; the entire journey is reduced to a mere backdrop for the handsome couple formed by Charlton Heston and Donna Reed.

21 The tragic end of Sacajawea's awakening to the nobility of romantic love provides the last opportunity for the novelists to make their point about the superiority of American morals. At least three of the novels and the film relate an imagined encounter between Sacajawea and Judith, Clark's fiancée, during which Sacajawea would take full stock of her situation by measuring Judith's (called Julia in Dye's novel) beauty and grace :

> We can see Sacagawea now, startled and expectant, her heart beating like a trip-hammer under her bodice, looking at Julia! No dreams of her mountains had ever shown such sunny hair, such fluffs of curls, like moonrise on the water. And that diaphanous cloud, - was it a dress ? No Shoshone girl ever saw such buckskin, finer than blossom of the bitter-root. (Dye, 351)
>
> It was when she saw Judy that she realized once and for all, that she could never be quite like a white woman. Judy, not only generous and kind by nature, but ardently anxious to please her husband, exerted herself to be agreeable. It was not easy. Sacagawea had no pretty parlor graces, no social suavity...'I cannot be like these

> people. Their clothes feels strange. My hands cannot be like those small white hands of Ju-dith's.' (Hueston 356-8)

22 The film presents a similar scene in which Sacajawea realizes that Clark's true place is in the parlor with a dainty cloud of finery and she must return to her people. In the novels, she bravely understands that her place is with Charbonneau, even if this means « wearing her life away in hopeless drudgery as one of the Frenchman's squaws. » (Hueston 334) The fate which the novelists imagine for Sacajawea after the expedition is similar to Otter Woman's (Charbonneau's first wife) ; a life of slavery made all the more ignoble because Charbonneau, obsessed with young girls, marries again, as we saw in the passage above. Peattie goes further, imagining the Frenchman beating Sacajawea, causing her to run away from him : « He had heard that Charbonneau had struck her once too often, this time at the instigation of a new young wife, and Sacajawea had walked forth from his roof, free at last because her son, grown a man, no longer needed a father. » (Peattie 264) Finally, despite Clark's generosity, Charbonneau decides to return to the Mandan village. The novelists interpret this as the sign that the Frenchman cannot readjust to civilized life in St. Louis, is too lazy for the hard life of farming, and is bored with the monogamous lifestyle imposed on him.

23 If the mediocre quality of expedition fiction (with the exception of *The Big Sky*) is any evidence, it would seem that bringing to the page or the screen what is so marvelous about the expedition—hearing and then viewing the Great Falls, sighting the Rockies or approaching the Pacific—was a doomed enterprise, perhaps because the story is better told by the captains themselves than by the authors who sought to popularize the great journey. The translation of their first-person accounts into fiction gives us the strange impression that they were minor characters in their own story. For example, it may seem strange that there is disagreement amongst expedition novelists over the question of Sacajawea's predilection for one or the other explorer : was she in love with Lewis or with Clark ? Two of the most popular novels, *The Conquest* and *Forward the Nation* portray a blushing Sacajawea flashing her dark eyes at Lewis, whereas the balance of the expedition novels and the film *The Far Horizons* feature a romance between Sacajawea and Clark. But this indecision simply illustrates the fact that the priority of the expedition novelists was to invent a love story at any cost. The representation of a romantic relationship between Sacajawea and one of the expedition leaders does not only reflect the powerful need for a fictional interpretation of the « conquest » of the west with which twentieth-century Americans could feel comfortable, as some critics have argued. It is also a sheer product of the desire for a commercial literary or cinematic success capitalizing on admiration for an Indian princess and dislike for a French coward. No one, however, seems very interested in sorting out truth from representation in the case of Toussaint Charbonneau.

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NOTES

1. The author of *The Conquest*, Eva Emery Dye, had this faint praise for Charbonneau: « The worst white man was better than an Indian husband.'" »(Dye, 196-7)
2. For a complete analysis of the suffragettes and Sacajawea, see D. Kessler.
3. Fans of American popular culture might find it interesting to note that the film and television actor chosen to play Charbonneau in *The Far Horizons*, Alan Reed, also served as the voice for Fred Flintstone in the *Flintstone Family* cartoons. This is a good indication of how powerful his voice was.
4. The following passage may be found in the journals of John MacDowell, who recorded the expeditions of the North West Company : « TC was stabbed at the Manitou-a-banc [Manitoba]end of the Portage la Prairie in the act of committing a Rape upon her Daughter by an old saultier woman with a Canoe Awl. » This quote may be found on the website of the National Park Service, www.nps.gov.
5. The authors of the Charbonneau entry on the Internet site www.pbs.org state have this to say in his defense : « considering the context of time, place and social values under which he lived, his unseemly traits have been accentuated and embellished...influenced by behavioral standards socially enlightened two centuries after the expedition. »

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